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RECENT HISTORY AND PRESENT STATUS OF THE VINLAND PROBLEM

By W. H. BABCOCK

It is now eight years since the author published the results of his researches into the matter of Vinland.¹ He here proposes to analyze the subsequent developments in comment and theory of this three-century-old problem, whose solution is still incomplete.

In "Early Norse Visits to North America" it was urged, as had been urged previously by Dr. Storm and others, that among Vinland saga texts our reliance should be mainly on the eldest—the Hauk's Book narrative and the nearly identical, though independently copied, manuscript No. 557 of the Arna-Magnaean collection at Copenhagen, entitled "Eric the Red," and that the Flatey Book version should be used only incidentally and with special caution. It was further stressed that in geographic identification we must distinguish the names of extensive regions (usually ending in "land") from those which mark some notable local feature of the coast line and that in dealing with both, and especially in dealing with the latter, we have to consider and compare the coast of about the year 1000, which is not necessarily the same as that of today. The final conclusion was that allowing, however imperfectly, for these transformations and for the natural failure in exactness of a popular story growth which remained unwritten for about two hundred years, we may still say that Karlsefni's main quarters in Vinland (Straumfiord) were most likely at Passamaquoddy Bay, with Grand Manan Island (Straumey) out before it in the currents at the mouth of the Bay of Fundy; and that Hóþ, the most southerly point which he attained, was almost certainly in lower New England, perhaps (though not necessarily) at Mount Hope Bay (see Fig. 1, p. 267.)

Some of the foregoing suggestions—especially as to coastal changes and the difference between a "land" and a spot—would seem almost too rudimentary and obvious for statement, except for the fact that they are so perversely disregarded by really notable writers.

Hovgaard's Work

In 1914 appeared an important book, "The Voyages of the Norsemen to America,"² by Professor William Hovgaard, an acknowledged authority on nautical architecture and engineering and on navigation, also exceptionally versed in Scandinavian matters. Its preliminary presentation of

¹ W. H. Babcock: Early Norse Visits to North America, *Smithsonian Misc. Colls.*, Vol. 59, No. 19, Washington, D. C., 1913.

² William Hovgaard: The Voyages of the Norsemen to America (Scandinavian Monographs, Vol. 1), New York, 1914.

the lives, homes, and relics of old-time Icelanders and Greenlanders is particularly interesting. His account of the means and methods of Norse navigation is a worthy companion to Dr. Nansen's treatment³ of the same subject, which was published while Professor Hovgaard's book was in preparation. Thus we have two independent mutually supplementing and perhaps equally valuable dissertations by experts on the problem from "the point of view of the navigator"—a quite vital one. Taken together their attractive and helpful presentations seem to have exhausted that branch of the subject.

HOVGAARD'S USE OF ILLUSTRATION

There is another feature of the work on which Professor Hovgaard seems to lay especial stress and which has a certain interest and value. He calls attention to the lack in Dr. Nansen's volumes of "any description or illustrations of the coasts of America likely to have been visited by the Norsemen" and himself provides a series of photographic views taken at intervals all the way from Baffin Land to New Jersey. Necessarily they leave many points unshown, but they present a more nearly complete exhibition of the kind than has hitherto been attempted. Obviously, it is confined to the sea front as it appears now. Probably some parts of the coast have changed little in aspect since Thorfinn Karlsefni's time, and for purposes of comparison with the words of the sagas the illustrations are strictly relevant; but such is not always the case.

TESTIMONY AS TO TRANSFORMING CHANGES

Professor Hovgaard incidentally bears significant testimony to transforming changes.

A characteristic feature of Labrador, and, as mentioned above, of Baffin Land also, is the deposit of drifted boulders with which the surface of the country is thickly strewn, left on the bed rock by the ice of the glacial period. The presence of these boulders is especially marked on the higher levels; in fact, near the coast below the two-hundred-and-fifty-foot level they have been largely washed away or ground down by the sea during the process of uplift of the land which took place in post glacial times. Many boulders are left stranded in the valleys of the emerging land on the so-called raised boulder beaches. These boulders remind us of the *hellur* of the sagas, that is the rocks, or large (flat) stones, which suggested to the Norsemen the name "Helluland."⁴

The passage which Professor Hovgaard has chiefly in mind is no doubt that from Hauk's Book, rendered by him as follows:

They sailed first to the Western Settlement and from there to Bjarneyar (Bear Islands). Thence they bore away southward two days . . . , when they saw land and put out the boat and explored the land and found there large flat stones, many of which were twelve ells wide. . . . There were many Arctic foxes there. They called the land Helluland.⁵

³ Fridtjof Nansen: *In Northern Mists*, translated by A. G. Chater, 2 vols., New York, 1911.

⁴ Hovgaard, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-195.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

The parallel but slightly more archaic manuscript, A.M. 557, has "with a north wind" instead of "southward" and defines the width of the stones by the statement "two men could spurn soles" on one of them, obviously lying at length. *Hellur*, meaning flagstones, would not perfectly fit ordinary boulders; but the Norsemen may have named by analogy rather than by strict identity, as we all often do. Now an illustration of Thorfinn Karlsefni's landing might or might not show a "boulder beach" at water level, for the text does not absolutely require this, but it would be quite likely to present a foreground considerably different from anything that we can see now. Of course, nothing which was then under water can help in identification. The Ragged Islands that figure conspicuously in one of his views are a probable case in point. Professor Hovgaard elsewhere ascribes a similar and still continuing uplift to Newfoundland. However, it may be granted that there has been less transformation of abrupt coasts like those of parts of Newfoundland. It would seem that a cliff may usually be raised or lowered a few feet or a few score feet without greatly changing the aspect of its wave-washed base. As will be mentioned later, more important modifications in appearance and productiveness may have taken place on more southerly parts of the North American coast as the result of submergence.

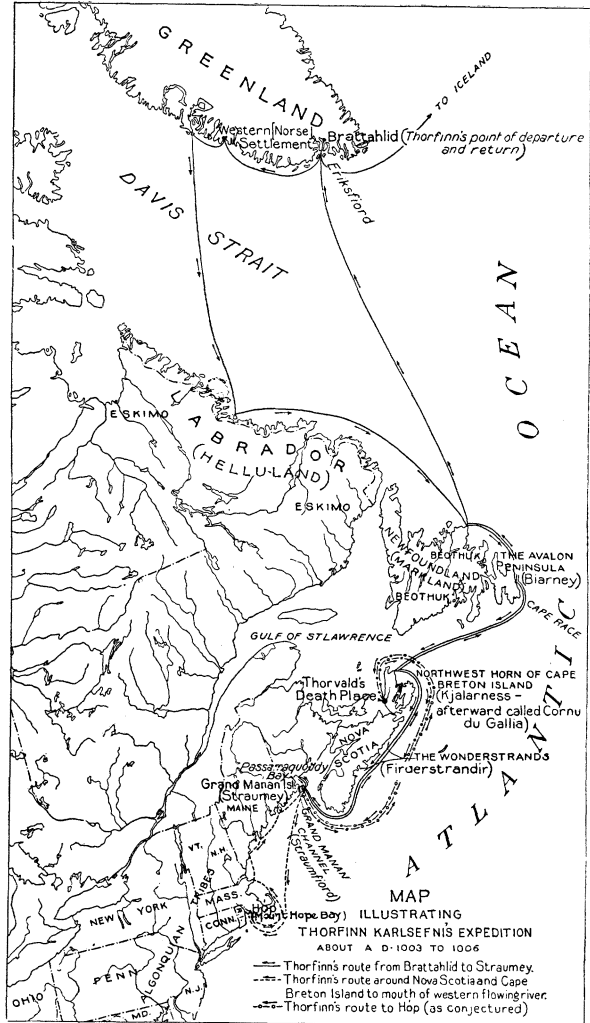


FIG. 1.—Map illustrating the Vinland Problem reproduced on a reduced scale from map accompanying the author's work, "Early Norse Visits to North America."

A CONFUSION OF SAGA GEOGRAPHY

A salient feature of the book is a conjectural duplication or triplication of saga geography. We are told that Leif's Vinland may be distinct from anything visited by Karlsefni and that "the Markland of one expedition may have been the Vinland of another, and the Helluland of one expedition may not have been the Helluland of another."⁶ This curious way of looking at things reaches almost perversity in such a statement as: "If Markland was at Cape Porcupine, we must seek Vinland (i.e. Leifsbooths) farther down."⁷ True, Professor Hovgaard is here dealing with the local identification of another; but these passages reveal a too narrow tendency to treat a great region as a particular place. He would never dream of restricting old-time Iceland to Skalholt or old-time Greenland to Gardar; but he has a strong tendency to identify Vinland with Leifsbooths or Hóp or some other restricted neighborhood; and his objection to Cape Porcupine for Markland is not that it is a cape, a mere spot instead of a land, but that it is the wrong cape or spot.

He recognizes, however, that the relative positions of the three American lands are always the same in the sagas: "Markland was in a lower latitude than Helluland, and Vinland was in a still lower latitude than Markland."⁸ In this they reflected reality: The American sea front presented first the region of treeless, stony northern wastes; then, going southward, the forest country, still cold during many months and not bountiful in natural yield except of timber and game; and lastly the warm and fertile land of vines producing abundant grapes and that wild grain which in its young growth looked like wheat, though it was really wild rice, and which the Norsemen called self-sown wheat by analogy, being amply familiar with wheat, raisins, and wine by reason of their European trade.

EFFORTS TO HARMONIZE HAUK'S BOOK AND THE FLATEY BOOK

Professor Hovgaard is not at all content with Dr. Storm's arraignment of the Flatey Book narrative as a late corruption of the Hauk's Book saga distinguished by numerous errors quite out of accord with seasons and conditions in the new world and of a kind least likely to be made by a contemporary. He is at some pains to harmonize the two versions almost *vi et armis* even where they are apparently in conflict—an amiable and helpful intent if it were feasible. The results are sometimes curious. Thus he ascribes two American voyages to Leif, although neither version nor any tradition is aware of more than one; but two are required to provide for inconsistent events, motives, and details. The credit of first discovery is given to Biarni instead of Leif, to save the former's voyage for the Flatey Book, but the credit of the latter is not stalwart enough to carry the voyage

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

story of Leif's half sister Freydis and her ghastly inhumanities, which he supposes, agreeing with most others, to be developed unwarrantably from some grotesque but harmless hints in Hauk's Book. The inconvenient accounts of southern conditions and products at Hóp—which he considers much more northern—are explained as transfers from a supposed narrative of Leif's explorations, now lost to us.

According to Professor Hovgaard's calculation, Biarni struck by accident on the Newfoundland coast, made his second landing at Hamilton Inlet, Labrador, and his third probably at an island off Baffin Land, whence he sailed to his father's Greenland home. Leif, having in a previous voyage struck on the lower coast, reversed Biarni's route, continued it along the sea front of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia to Cape Sable, "Leif's Markland," then crossed the Gulf of Maine to southern New England. He says: "Leif's Vinland was in the region of Cape Cod."⁹ Leif may well have been there, but the data are too meager for confident assertion. No doubt he reached some seaboard where warmth prevailed and grapes fit for wine making abounded. Beyond that we can neither affirm nor deny. But the conception of Vinland among the old Norsemen apparently would include Cape Cod.

SCHEDULE OF KARLSEFNI'S VOYAGE

The Hovgaard map of Karlsefni's voyage places his first landing on the extreme northern part of the Labrador coast; his second (supposed to be in Markland) less defensibly on the same coast a little below Nain, near the northern limit of even rather small trees, where perhaps no one ever thought of finding a forest before; his third, Straumfiord, their chief Vinland home, on Sandwich Bay also in Labrador, moderately available as a rather cold oasis but in the immediate neighborhood of the shore aptly described by Cartwright as "the country God gave to Cain;" and, finally, his most southern point, Hóp the delightful, at or near Sop's Arm on the particularly inhospitable front of northern Newfoundland. In view of the many fine and valuable things which the book contains, such a schedule must be found disappointing. In the saga the whole region near Straumfiord is presented as attractive during summer time.

There were mountains there, and the country roundabout was fair to look upon. They did naught but explore the country. There was tall grass there.

Of Hóp it is written:

There were self-sown wheat fields on the land there wherever there were hollows and wherever there was hilly ground there were vines. . . . They remained there that winter. No snow came, and all of their live stock lived by grazing.¹⁰

Perhaps "no snow" is to be understood as no snow that would lie deep and interfere with grazing. There might be very little snowfall, indeed, during

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 228

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 107

an unusually mild winter at Narragansett Bay. But it cannot be pretended that the winter conditions recited fit Newfoundland. The only recourse is to discard such passages; but they are integral, characteristic, and significant parts of the saga, and there is no trace of interpolation.

Fossum's Work

More recent and a little less full is Dr. Fossum's discussion of the Norse discovery of America. The following sentence from the introduction gives the spirit of his treatment: "If this work has any character of its own, it is that it accepts without reserve the statements of the saga narrative and attempts to follow the text closely."¹¹

ORIGIN AND CHARACTER OF THE SAGA

This is going much too far in the other direction. Such acceptance might be warranted if we had in hand authenticated contemporary narrations of the normal historic kind; but no one pretends that the explorers brought a saga back with them or even wrote one afterward. There may have been written memoranda in the nature of a ship's log, though the prevailing opinion is that even these items passed by oral tradition only. For the rest the Vinland-voyage parts of the most nearly trustworthy version that we have are chiefly of ballad-like verses translated into prose and presenting successive episodes in a graphic, imaginative, sometimes mythical, way. As I have suggested in "Early Norse Visits:" "A not extravagant ingenuity may distinguish the episodes of Thorhall the Huntsman, the Gaelic Runners, the Battle at Hóp, the Death of Thorvald, the Markland Captives, and the Death of Biarni, each easily separable and individual, as probably single ballads in their original shape."¹² Two of them preserve residua of the original verses, which by diction and meter are said to belong to the eleventh century.

The more voluminous earlier portion of the saga, dealing with events in Iceland and Greenland, and especially the latter, is developed from, or built up about, the achievements of Eric the Red and in a lesser degree the experiences of Gudrid, the wife of Thorstein Ericsson and afterward of the more successful explorer, Thorfinn Karlsefni. It is picturesque with elaborate sorceries, gruesome prophecies by a supposedly reanimated corpse, and sufferings from threatened shipwreck, famine, and pestilence.

These varied materials were brought together, through what intermediate procedure we cannot tell, and took shape in the final saga-composer's hands about the year 1200, to judge by the nobly epic style which is characteristic of that period. There may have been some changes between that time and its final copying into Hauk's Book a few years before the death of Hauk Erlendsson in 1334. It is certain there were some divergencies in different

¹¹ Andrew Fossum: *The Norse Discovery of America*, Minneapolis, Minn., 1918, p. 8.

¹² Babcock, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

copies, for the parallel and corroborative manuscript A.M. 557 varies slightly at several points and omits the final genealogy, which Hauk himself apparently added. Even at the first there was some uncertainty; the saga itself frankly gives us an alternative variant of the Hóþ expedition, making Karlsefni take but a part of his force with him, leave Biarni and Gudrid behind at Straumfiord, and return after only two months' stay. There are signs, too, that the saga man permitted himself occasional liberties with his material. Thus Haki and Haekia as the matter stands are said to find grapes and grain in spring, that is, about the time that the eggs of sea birds and waterfowl were plentiful. Their little story does not synchronize with the rest of the saga. There can be no doubt that we have here a real instance of displacement. Whether for Thorfinn or for Leif before him, these Gaelic Runners did their rapid investigating, if at all, in the early autumn.

However much we may value this saga for its general evidence of an important feature of history and for its high and entertaining literary qualities, can we reasonably treat it as a sacred gospel to be followed "without reserve" and "closely" in all its "statements"?

ORIGIN AND CHARACTER OF THE FLATEY BOOK NARRATIVE

The case for the Flatey Book narrative is much worse. We have no history of it before its copying in 1385; but good judges hold that its composition cannot have been much earlier, determining by the test of style, which is crucial in these Icelandic matters. That is it became a saga about 350 or 375 years after the Vinland voyages. The saga composer had knowledge of some version of the Hauk's Book narrative, for he refers to the Saga of Eric and in another place mentions Karlsefni as having given the fullest account of Vinland matters. He must also have had access to other traditional sources for items which seem authentic, such as the palisades around Thorfinn's house, the grain shed on an island, and the crude astronomical observation of the length of the day and the sun's rising and setting, presumably made at Straumfiord. But he has confused this bay with Hóþ; has multiplied voyages, making almost every prominent person of Thorfinn's party head one of them; and has generally blurred the record. Leifsbooths, of which the other saga knows nothing and which Leif can hardly have had time to build in the Vinland interruption of his main mission, are found by each succeeding party of explorers apparently intact (for there is no suggestion of rebuilding) even after the natives had shown themselves furiously hostile and would surely have visited destruction on anything belonging to the invaders. Inconsistencies and errors abound.

Nevertheless, Dr. Fossum prefers the Flatey Book version in most cases where the two differ, although, like Professor Hovgaard, he aims to utilize both. Here is his statement of the case.

The two sagas that relate these exploits each presents [sic] a distinct phase of the events. The story of the Flateyrbok gives an account of the deeds of the family of Eirik the Red

and the Greenlanders. The story of the Karlsefne saga describes in detail the expedition of Karlsefne and the Icelanders. Karlsefne was an Icelander, resided in Iceland, and was there looked upon as a national hero. As long as it was possible to keep apart the stories of the Greenlanders and the Icelanders, there was no quarrel between the two sagas; but as soon as the geography of the new discoveries became confused and indistinct, the claims of the Greenlanders and Icelanders are sure to clash. . . . The saga of Bjarne, Leif, and Thorvald developed in Greenland . . . and was late in coming to Iceland. . . . The saga of Eirik the Red and his family in Greenland and the saga of Karlsefne in Iceland seem to have developed independently for at least two centuries. When at length they attempted to combine them they found that the only part that suited both was the account of Eirik the Red in Greenland. . . . Counter-claims were made by the partisans of the two families, and a strife arose which has continued down to our day. . . . In how far [sic] Karlsefne himself is guilty of misrepresenting the facts, and how much we are to attribute to his ambitious family, is not easy to determine. . . . At any rate they made claims which Leif's friends in Greenland could not concede. . . . In thinly veiled language they attacked even Eirik the Red, who had helped them in many ways and shown them great hospitality in Greenland.¹³

OBJECTION TO FOSSUM'S CONCLUSION

The total offending on which is based the charge of "ingratitude for his hospitality" seems to be that in the artless graphic fashion of such narratives, often concerned about trifles, the saga in Hauk's Book relates how Thorfinn Karlsefni from his ship stores helped out Eric's supplies at Christmas in a time of dearth, so that all enjoyed themselves mightily. This was probably true, having regard to the conditions of the time and place. The statement seems natural and harmless. One must demur to other features of these and like passages. We do not know that there was any saga of "Biarni, Leif, and Thorvald" nor that any saga ever was composed in Greenland. Biarni was not a member of "the family." The Greenland passages of the two sagas are far from identical. There is no Karlsefni saga authoritatively so named from the beginning. Centuries after the copying of Hauk's Book, Arne Magnusson found its version left without title and wrote into the blank space above it: "The Saga of Thorfinn Karlsefni and Snorri Thorbrandson," but it is generally believed that the title should be "The Saga of Erik the Red" as in the case of the companion manuscript A.M. 557. There is no proof of any strife between Icelanders and Greenlanders over claims to glorification in or by these sagas. The Erik the Red saga of Hauk's Book and its companion does not appear to have been conceived at all in a spirit of hostility to that chieftain and his family or disparagement of them.

It is very far from being a eulogy of Karlsefni or Icelanders generally at the expense of Eric's family or of Greenlanders, and it is not the narrative of an exclusively Icelandic voyage, as thus contradistinguished; though, as to that, all Greenlanders were then Icelanders of less than twenty years' residence in Greenland. It certainly presents Thorfinn Karlsefni's claims to distinction, but he was almost a member of Eric's household circle and at any rate had rendered a conspicuously important service which could not be suppressed.

¹³ Fossum, *op. cit.*, pp. 134, 135, 137, 147-148.

A more plausible indictment for injustice to the family of Eric might be drawn against the Flatey Book version, which deprives Leif of the credit of first discovery in favor of the outsider Biarni and charges Freydis with most diabolical murders, including the unprovoked slaughter of several quite helpless women by her own hand. However, there is no need to impute any sinister motive or unfair bias to the composer of either form of the saga. The pleasure of telling a good story and explaining historical matters would no doubt be motive enough. This article has already indicated how these narratives probably came into their present volume and shape.

FOSSUM'S LOCATION OF VINLAND ON THE ST. LAWRENCE

As a result of his study of the sagas, in particular of their sailing directions, real or fancied, and with some personal inspection of the ground, Dr. Fossum dissents widely from some parts of Professor Hovgaard's scheme of courses and landings. In the case of Karlsefni the comparison is not startling. Dr. Fossum merely shifts Straumfiord from Sandwich Bay, Labrador, to Notre Dame Bay, Newfoundland, and Hóp from one Newfoundland bay to another a little more southward, without making the identification appreciably more acceptable. But the treatment of Leif is quite revolutionary. Instead of carrying him to Cape Cod and warm regions beyond it with Professor Hovgaard, Dr. Fossum takes him through the strait of Belle Isle and the Gulf of St. Lawrence westward to the island of Anticosti and the mouth of the St. Lawrence River, then up the river as far as the northern limit of growth of the large wild grape at the Isle of Orleans. In other words, his Vinland is not on the seaboard in relatively warm latitudes but inland westward up and down that northern river, where winter is winter indeed. It follows that Thorvald's western boat voyage is exclusively a river journey and his eastern voyage becomes a nearly complete circumnavigation of the gulf. But the settlement of Leifsbooths, the alleged chief home in Vinland, is placed on the St. Lawrence River, and there's not much about it all to suggest the old geographers' conception of a possible connection with Africa.

Considering that both Professor Hovgaard and Dr. Fossum rely chiefly on the Flatey Book for all events preceding the voyage of Thorfinn Karlsefni, that their methods are much alike, and that both are especially equipped for the task, it seems curious and suggestive that such diverse results should be reached.

A brief inspection of some of these Flatey Book guideposts may be instructive. It is related of Leif's party:

When they were ready they sailed out to sea and found first the land which Biarni and his shipmates found last. Great ice mountains lay inland back from the sea. . . . They returned to the ship, put out to sea, and found a second land. . . . They sailed away from the mainland with northeast winds and were out two days before they sighted land.

These vague assertions appear to have been strung together to continue the story, without an attempt at such precision as would guide future navigators or permit close identification of places. Some other statements are perhaps a shade more particular, but it is manifestly unsafe to treat them as invariably significant, exact, and reliable and to strain for the utmost that can be evolved from them. Such a procedure might land us in any harbor.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE CROSS

In support of his Vinland by the St. Lawrence Dr. Fossum cites instances of early missionaries who found the cross in that region, with some accompanying vestiges of Christianity. We cannot tell how far the wish may have been father to the thought in the case of these good priests. The cross is a rather widely spread symbol. But if it and other religious relics of any kind really were left by white visitors there is still no occasion for crediting the gift to the Norsemen, especially since they at the opening of the eleventh century were newly and imperfectly Christianized at the best. But other white peoples with a more deeply grounded Christianity may well have been on the St. Lawrence long before the time when the cross surprised the priests. The map of Sylvanus, 1511, shows the Gulf pretty accurately and affords a fair indication that some one had explored it. Basque and Breton fishing crews frequented the banks of Newfoundland and the neighboring shores still earlier and may have sailed far within. It is needless to prolong the list of possibilities. There is nothing at all to connect these supposed vestiges of Christian faith with the Norsemen.

THE TESTIMONY OF THE GAME LACROSSE

As further reinforcement Dr. Fossum cites the game of lacrosse, which has already done similar duty in several works. But those who know the Indian best seem convinced that it is of exclusively native origin. Any partial parallels of Norwegian origin may well pass as coincidences or as being conceivably due to some vastly remoter common ancestry—the former being much more likely. But even if the Norsemen taught lacrosse to some Indian tribe the performance may have taken place at any one of many points along the coast. There is nothing to anchor it to Gaspé, Anticosti, or the Isle of Orleans. Surely the case for corroboration is as wavering and tenuous as heat haze in summer time. The St. Lawrence hypothesis is not new with Dr. Fossum. Indeed, as applied to Great Ireland, it is at least as old as Eugène Beauvois' work¹⁴ on the discovery of the New World by the Irish; that is to say, the seventies of the last century. Though never widely accepted and though discountenanced by facts and climatic conditions, this theory comes into sight now and then with a new advocate.

¹⁴ Eugène Beauvois: *Le découverté du nouveau monde par les irlandais*, Nancy, 1875; map on p. 82.

FOSSUM'S REAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE SUBJECT

One can only say that Dr. Fossum has been more happy in some less salient and capital contentions. He has made it seem even more probable than before that Eric the Red extended his first explorations to a part of Baffin Land. He may be right also in supposing that the Bear Islands, from which Karlsefni took off more or less to the southward on his voyage to Helluland, lay on or near the Baffin Land shore—Upper Greenland or Baffin Land, it matters little which. A northerly wind such as is mentioned in the saga would facilitate the voyage from either point, with a difference of only a few degrees in the direction of sailing. It may, however, be as well to adhere to the still general understanding till we have more conclusive evidence that this point of departure was on the western, not the eastern, side of Davis Strait.

STEENSBY'S VIEWS AND GAGNON'S CRITICISM

Mr. Alphonse Gagnon, of Quebec, thoroughly conversant with the productions and temperature of that region, has had a word to say concerning the hypothesis which locates Vinland there.¹⁵ It is in reply to a study by the learned Danish ethnographer-geographer, Professor Steensby, unhappily since deceased, on "The Norsemen's Route from Greenland to Wineland,"¹⁶ which with local differences follows the same general lines as Dr. Fossum's work. Mr. Gagnon expresses grave doubt that the Norsemen would find wild grapes in the territory now comprised in the county of Montmagny, at least in such quantity and quality as would justify the name Vinland. He finds other incongruities in the saga statements that the cattle lived freely at pasture in winter time and that the ground was not frozen.

Steensby takes Karlsefni as well as Leif up the St. Lawrence and finds Keelness near the mouth of the Saguenay, instead of on the Newfoundland shore, while Straumfiord becomes a reach of the lower St. Lawrence River, Straumey the Small Hare Island therein, Hóp a slight expansion of the Rivière du Sud a little above its mouth near St. Thomas, and Wineland the southern shore of the main river and the country behind roughly corresponding to the county of Montmagny or in a wider sense the whole lower part of the valley of the St. Lawrence River. This is more thoroughgoing than Dr. Fossum's scheme of the voyages and offers a welcome relief from the contrasting references to "Leif's Vinland" and "Karlsefni's Vinland" in some recent works. But the Danish writer appears to attain unity and conformity by establishing both of them in inadmissible quarters, condemned by considerations of climate and natural production such as Gagnon has indicated. However there is, of course, much of solid worth in Professor

¹⁵ Alphonse Gagnon: La question du Vinland, *Bull. Soc. de Géogr. de Québec*, Vol. 12, 1918, pp. 211-218.

¹⁶ H. P. Steensby: Norsemen's Route from Greenland to Wineland, *Meddelelser om Grønland*, Vol. 56, Copenhagen, 1918, pp. 149-202.

Steensby's little treatise. It insists on Dr. Storm's position in favor of the Eric the Red saga as given by Hauk's Book and A.M. 557 and the comparative unreliability of the Flatey Book version.

VIGNAUD'S POSITION

The veteran historical investigator Henry Vignaud has published an interesting review¹⁷ of my "Early Norse Visits to North America." It comprises a very fair summary of much of the contents of that book and presents many remarks with which I am in accord. However, Mr. Vignaud does not think we are warranted in seeking lands of Norse discovery so far south as southern New England. He believes that if these redoubtable people had discovered a country so lovely and fertile as that where they have placed their station of Hóp they would have remained there, notwithstanding the admittedly dangerous hostility of the Indians. But we must not accept unreservedly the nearly impossible feats of arms recorded in the Icelandic sagas. These Norsemen were good soldiers but not magicians. Also there were few of them, while the Indians were relatively very numerous. Thorfinn Karlsefni's Vinland expedition, the largest on record, numbered only a hundred and sixty men. On the other hand, the region about Narragansett Bay was probably abundantly populated by natives, as it was when white men next found the place. The Norsemen, of course, had no firearms and were little, if any, better supplied with missile weapons than their opponents. Their principal advantage was in the possession of steel swords and axes as contrasted with the stone tomahawks of the Indians; then, too, their shields protected them. There is also something to be said for their wider, if still credulous, intelligence and their better disciplined ways. But all these advantages could not offset such great odds nor sufficiently fortify them against the wearing, unhopeful discomfort of living constantly on guard against a relentless and stealthy enemy. Some of the early English settlements, better equipped than the Norse, failed utterly; others maintained their ground with difficulty by the aid of repeated reinforcements from an ample home population in times of readier transit. The Greenlanders and Icelanders in Vinland were practically cut off from their bases, and, even had these been accessible, few men could have been spared from Greenland. It seems that Karlsefni consulted only common prudence in withdrawing from an untenable outpost while his force was not yet weakened. The final abandonment of Vinland was determined, according to the saga, by fierce quarrels at Straumfiord among the colonists themselves over the women; also perhaps in some degree by the unsatisfactory winter conditions of the place. It all seems to follow very naturally and quite in the order of things, human nature, savage and quasi civilized, being as history discloses.

¹⁷ *Journ. Soc. des Américanistes de Paris*, Vol. II, 1914, No. I, pp. 335-337.

DELABARRE'S SUMMING UP OF RECENT OPINION

Professor Delabarre, while dealing amply and excellently with a quite distinct theme,¹⁸ has incidentally reviewed the recent course of opinion as to the problems of the Vinland voyages, taking a kind of straw vote of the authors represented in his notes and observing changes of judgment from time to time. He disclaims positive conclusions of his own, for reasons given; but his brief summary presents very favorably the work and views of Dr. Fossum, who "seems to establish conclusively the fact that Leif's Vinland and Thorfinn's Hóp were different regions."¹⁹ As already set forth, one cannot recognize Hóp as a "region" at all nor admit that Vinland was a region which did not include Hóp.

THE BEARING OF THE DIGHTON ROCK INSCRIPTION

Professor Delabarre relates some interesting observations which he has made bearing on the subsidence or non-subsidence of land in the neighborhood of Dighton Rock,²⁰ consequently in all probability about Narragansett and Mount Hope bays as well. He is doubtless right in attaching importance to the marsh-growth investigations of Mr. Charles A. Davis, tending to establish depression of the New England coast even considerably farther north. His own experiences with Indian artifacts on an old level below the marsh-peat surface of an island near the rock have a like tendency. Regarding the surface on which the rock has stood the evidence of certain colonial entries suggests movement in the opposite direction so far as concerns the last two or three centuries. But these entries, as cited, seem indefinite with regard to the area now under water. In any case, it is not necessary to maintain a subsidence of the coast continuing till the present time nor till those entries were made. It is hardly reasonable to suppose that a part of the Dighton Rock inscription was carved under water or in immediate expectation of overflow, such as regularly happens now. The year 1003 is a long way off and allows leeway for considerable changes. One need only suppose a moderate lowering of level—regular or irregular, continuous or discontinuous—during some part of the last nine hundred years. Wild rice is still native to the Narragansett region; we picture ample beds of it in the time of Karlsefni, the wild "wheat" in "hollows" of the saga, where now is only water. It is not likely that one neighborhood is an exception to the general behavior of the lower coast, easily accounted for by the post-glacial uplift of the shore farther north.²¹

¹⁸ E. B. Delabarre: *Recent History of Dighton Rock*, *Publs. Colonial Soc. of Massachusetts*, Vol. 20, Boston, 1920, pp. 286-462; reference on pp. 315-317.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 399 and 400.

²¹ The generally accepted theory of recent and continuing subsidence of the Atlantic coast of the United States and the southeastern coast of Canada has been controverted by Professor D. W. Johnson who sets forth the theory of coastal stability within historic times. See the article "Is the Atlantic Coast Sinking?," *Geogr. Rev.*, Vol. 3, 1917, pp. 135-139.

Conclusions

It will be observed from the foregoing summary of the work of recent writers that there is a considerable tendency to rehabilitate the Flatey Book narrative as an authority or source; to partly harmonize the two versions by making them deal with expeditions to distinct regions, by multiplying Vinlands, and the rest; and to disregard the saga's explicit statements of the favorable conditions of Hóp and to locate that bay at one point or another of the chill face of Newfoundland. By some writers Leif's Vinland fares better, being allowed to stray even as far as southern Massachusetts; but by others it is held fast to the shores of the St. Lawrence. A minutely literal method of construing these old half historical voyage stories, to which we have all perhaps been too much addicted, has now about reached its climax. To say that the foregoing features of criticism and exposition prevail for the present is not, of course, to admit that they are mainly sound or correct. Not very long ago Nansen's mythological criticism was in the ascendant, threatening to obliterate the saga altogether. That phase has passed; and works like Dr. Fossum's, attempting a literal following of the words of both sagas, with no allowances or as few as possible, are perhaps a natural reaction.

A MIDDLE GROUND POSSIBLE

We need not go quite to either extreme. It is unnecessary to shut our eyes to certain elements of myth in the sagas, but we may wisely decline to treat as purely mythical the plain statements of real products and conditions that are still found *in situ* and only needed finding then. Similarly, there is no need to treat as something too precious to be tampered with such statements as that they sailed just two days before making each of their first three discoveries. This conventional formula would readily slip in from a saga man's pen long afterward, as would also some hints of direction that have occasionally been held to require very great precision in construing; also such a bit of careless attribution as the skin boats alleged to be in use by the Indians at Hóp. Possibly this may likewise be true of the explosive Indian weapon which is still inadequately explained, for it surely is not the archaic Algonquian two-men club, as Schoolcraft once fancied.

ANTECEDENT PROBABILITY OF A NORSE VISIT TO CAPE COD

It has often been said, very soundly, that even if there were no sagas and records of voyages we must believe that a daring race of seafarers like the Norsemen could not remain several centuries settled in Greenland without visiting by accident or design the neighboring regions of America. It is likely that Eric touched, or at least saw, Baffin Land in the course of his first three years' Greenland explorations. If not, hunting parties of the Nordsetr men were certain to do so before long. Labrador, too, lying next below, and also offering a broad front to Greenland across a comparatively

narrow sea, was plainly marked by destiny for early discovery. These things are obvious. As to lower regions, it is true that neither Baffin Land nor northern Labrador would offer much suggestion of more hospitable climes to lure the visitors farther southward; but there remained the probability of a chance southern landfall, storm-driven, in an age when charts and compasses were wanting and men were greatly at the mercy of wind and weather. A report of warm, rich southern country, a veritable earthly paradise to men from relatively cheerless and meager latitudes, would surely reinforce the zeal of southward-coasting explorers, so as to carry them well on toward the abundance and comfort reported. According to the saga, this was just what happened. Leif, on the long transatlantic voyage from Norway, was storm-driven from his course for Greenland and brought to Vinland, probably not farther north than Cape Cod and possibly much below it. On his very favorable report, Thorfinn Karlsefni and his friends organized an expedition of would-be Vinland settlers and followed the American coast downward, perhaps at first in wide loops of sea sailing, as knowing that they could not yet be near a desirable home site, but afterward more closely, scrutinizing as they sailed, until they reached a bay of northern Vinland with a country about it very lovely in summer time, though sure to prove dangerously unproductive and cold in winter—as they could not yet know.

It all happens in the saga as it naturally would happen, and the best proof of general authenticity is that, according to its record, the Norsemen found what they were sure to find—since it was really there. The capital item of allurements, Vinland (Wineland) the Good, lay in waiting all the time, a land where great beds of wild grain bordered the estuaries and shallow parts of rivers; a land of ample timber growth where grapevines festooned the wooded hillsides, often yielding large grapes of delightful flavor; an extensive land, stretching up and down the coast, in parts bending far out eastward and warm enough in its lower reaches to suggest a connection with Africa.

MARKLAND AND HELLULAND

Markland and Helluland, of course, were also there, distinguished by their characteristics of forestry and stoniness, with all kinds of game in the one and Arctic foxes in the other. Some latitude may be allowed as to their boundaries, which doubtless were not very clear to the Greenlanders or the later saga men. Undoubtedly Newfoundland was a forest land (Markland), and the term may then have included also a part of southern Labrador for the same reason.²² It was equally certain that if the explorers searched far enough they would find the Furdustrandir, a stretch of seemingly interminable flat sands and dunes sometimes on the mainland sometimes with a long, shallow lagoon between. This is a practically unbroken formation for all the shore south of New York; also, with one or two breaks, for that

²² W. H. Babcock: Markland, Otherwise Newfoundland, *Geogr. Rev.*, Vol. 4, 1917, pp. 309-315.

between New York and the tip of Cape Cod. North of that it can hardly be said to exist, except in minor stretches, the most considerable and characteristic of which is probably the Atlantic front of Richmond County, Cape Breton, where boats are said to be hauled sometimes across the low isthmus of St. Peters to the inland water known as Bras d'Or. Nine hundred years ago the low strands of this Nova Scotian part of the coast may have been much more extended than now. Whether or not these were specifically the beaches intended, the explorers certainly must have had afterward ample experience farther southward with the strands which seemed so long that the vessels would never have done sailing by them and so were named the Wonderstrands. Possibly these may have been dislodged from their proper place in the narrative. It is more important to note that here was something real and great, something of which the Norsemen could have no inkling from home experience, but which they found and recorded.

CORROBORATING FEATURES

Certain more restricted coastal features add corroboration. An island (Straumey) with strong currents about it set in front of an inlet and bay (Straumfiord) with fine grass country about it may not be exclusively American; but the combination is rather unusual, and some search would be required to find it in either hemisphere. It is found, however, at the mouth of the Bay of Fundy in Grand Manan Island, Grand Manan Channel, Passamaquoddy Bay, and the surrounding region. Again, the saga calls for a peninsula extending northward and containing a river flowing from the east to the west. This peninsula or a conspicuous point on it is named Keelness (Kjalarness). Stefánsson's map of 1570 (or 1590) names it Promontorium Winlandiae, showing that tradition held it to be the northern extremity of Vinland. Now there are four northward peninsulas on our coast; the upper end of Labrador just south of Hudson straits and barred by its practically Arctic conditions; the northern peninsula of Newfoundland, riverless and far too chill; Cape Cod, which has no rivers; and the western northward-jutting part of Cape Breton Island, which has Margarie and Mabou Rivers, flowing as stated in the saga, and quite fulfills every requirement.

From Straumfiord, we are told, Karlsefni made a year's expedition southward, apparently seeking more favorable winter quarters. Sailing "a long way," his men established themselves at a Hóp, into which a river emptied before passing thence to the sea. They found vines and wild grain in all suitable places. In the winter it was so mild that their cattle lived by pasture and no snow fell—perhaps, as previously stated, we should understand none that would cover the ground and interfere with grazing. The conditions indicate a part of Vinland such as Leif had previously visited and such as was more worthy of the name. Several nearly landlocked bays in the middle parts of our coast would supply all that is called

for, perhaps none better than Mount Hope Bay between Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

One finds verisimilitude also in the behavior of the Indians, who first traded with them, afterward fought them, and were beaten off with difficulty, so that the white men judged it best to go back to Straumfiord. The story of the battle is very realistic and with the description of the natives must have come at first from an eyewitness, though the saga man may be responsible for a few interpolations as suggested above. The Norsemen would have had no data from which to invent these Indians. They must simply have experienced them.

Some question has been raised about the absence of "mountains" from the neighborhood of Passamaquoddy Bay and of Mount Hope Bay, though they are mentioned as at Straumfiord and Hóp in the saga. But what is a mountain? In the former instance the context shows that nothing Andean or Alpine could have been intended. Rather the reference is to such gracious fells or high rounded hills as we actually find. There is no mention of mountains in the description of Hóp. One manuscript only in dealing with a quite different region refers to the mountains which were at Hóp. If this be authentic, it may refer to the range of hills running northward from behind Fall River; but in any event it is too slight a reliance to control the identification of an important station.

THE PROBABLE COURSE OF KARLSEFNI'S EXPEDITION

In view of the above considerations it seems most likely that Karlsefni's expedition of explorers and intending settlers, after sailing south or south-west from known regions in western Greenland and barely landing on the treeless and cheerless front of upper Labrador, made a brief but longer stay in Newfoundland among the abundant game of its forests, crossed the strait of Cabot to the low sands and upjutting northern horn of Cape Breton Island but declined to round that cape into the Gulf, preferring to follow down the Atlantic face of Nova Scotia instead. This brought them to a bay-indented sea front and especially to the Bay of Fundy and its branches, the sweeping sides of which would attract double attention after the slightness of ebb and flow along the coast last left behind them. Here they established their home in a pleasant grassy country, bordering on Passamaquoddy Bay, with Grand Manan Island lying out before it. Here, too, they probably made the observation of *eyktarstadr* and *dagmalastadr* which has been such a bone of contention, being commonly assumed, without warrant, to mark their most southern point of travel. When food grew scant in winter time they moved out to the island, with some gain though still unsatisfied. They were within the borders of Vinland, but far north of its warmer parts which Leif had reached. The country about them was not a land of grapes, though in season a few specimens might be brought by scouts and runners from rather distant points. Wine was simply not to be

had. A search for a home site more truly representative of Vinland became urgent.

A minority of the explorers, led by Thorhall the Huntsman, thought it was to be found by sailing around Cape Breton Island to the Gulf beyond, and they departed in that quest with one vessel. But Karlsefni rightly judged that the greater (and doubtless the warmer) stretch of coast lay southward and sailed that way a long distance, perhaps crossing the Gulf of Maine directly, but possibly skirting its curved shore instead. The nearly landlocked bay, or Hóp, where he planted himself again, among the hills full of grapevines and the low grounds full of wild rice, may have been as far north as Ipswich, Massachusetts, but the conditions seem better met by some part of the southern face of New England, such as Mount Hope Bay. They landed and built their houses in the spring and lived there in comfort through the next summer and winter—the winter an exceptionally mild one—but, after a sojourn of a year, the hostility of the neighboring Indians drove them back to Passamaquoddy Bay.

Then Karlsefni with one ship essayed Thorhall's route, sailed around Cape Breton's upjutting promontory, and reached the mouth of the Marjorie or Mabou River, well down on its western side. Here again native hostility awaited him, and Thorvald Ericsson was killed by a sharpshooting archer. A futile chase left them with the impression that the aggressor was more and worse than human. So, to save the rest of their party, they hastened back again to Passamaquoddy. Then, baffled and disappointed and quarreling among themselves, they finally left Vinland altogether for Greenland, pausing at Markland on the way.

It seems that Rafn was about right as to the most southerly point reached, but his identification has suffered by the character of the supplemental local evidences brought forward needlessly in its support. The round tower, Dighton Rock, and the "skeleton in armor" do not recommend any hypothesis; but it is unfortunate that they should seem to detract from one entitled to serious consideration without them. Whether Leif touched the coast still farther south must remain a mere matter of fancy. Hóp seems to have supplied the conditions and data which he had reported.

There may have been other Norse voyages to America, we cannot estimate how many, and it is possible that the Flatey Book narrative may preserve a few items contributed by them; but it seems to me that Thorfinn Karlsefni's elaborate and long continued endeavor adequately to explore and permanently to settle is the only one of which we have a report that will enable us to trace it approximately in some detail, notwithstanding the strange way in which the narrative grew up into its final form; and that the course of events—and of the intending colonists—must have been pretty nearly as herein described.